

## **"Mother ... is not quite herself today."**

### **(Re)constructions of femininity in Sixties Popular Culture.**

*"Incidentally, did you see that he's now produced a virus that produces sterility in the male locust? – Admittedly the female locust can go on producing female locusts for a number of generations without male assistance, but one feels that it must tell sooner or later, or there wouldn't be much sense in sex, would there...?" (Wyndham 1963: 22)*

§0. The aim of this paper is to see how the issue of femininit(ies) cross-stitches with that of representation in Sixties popular culture. For this reason I shall be looking at those narrative and cinematic texts which I consider representative of the *Zeitgeist* of the decade, focusing in particular on those which are most profoundly linked to the visual media – and as such to two period-related communication devices, television and colour filming. My attempt at making a cultural sense of the popular productions of the Sixties (and especially of B-genres such as spy thrillers, horror cinema and SF) is obviously profoundly indebted to a reading of the varying cultural, social, historical, political, and economic, scenario of the period, which finds two crucial - and juxtaposing - watersheds first in the post-war upsurge in conservatism and just a few years on in the post-68 revolutionary social trends, which developed as a consequence of (as well as a reaction to) the widespread change in mores triggered by World War II.

As far as the issue of the representation of femininity is concerned, the decade presents at least two opposing, yet overlapping trends. In my argument, the new model of female aggressive sexuality which surfaced in the period (in part derived from the war-time emancipated women of the Forties,<sup>1</sup> but looking also ahead towards the sexual experimentation typical of the early-seventies girl) was seen as both a socially and individually threatening factor. This feeling of menace coupled with and was made even more disruptive by the post-war university boom (which brought an unprecedented number of women into further and higher education) and accordingly by the ever-increasing presence of specialized female labour, which overtook several of those professional areas which were traditionally considered masculine. Thus on a discursive level, two further considerations arise: whereas on the one hand the Sixties new woman appears increasingly assertive in both the professional and personal (and hence sexual) arenas, on the other her cultural and social (and thus generic) deviance is severally curbed and regimented by means of narrative structure and techniques, which repeatedly deflate her multiple attempts at dominion and condemn her to remaining the eroticised subject (and often the victim) of the male gaze.

In my reconstruction, the fluctuating cultural scenario of the Sixties recalls a tactical ground, where opposing, often gendered social drives simultaneously clash and overlap. Thus female desire encounters societal (and specifically male) defusion, whilst women's upsurging assertiveness is recurrently regimented by (patriarchal) authority and conservatively re-coded into time-honoured models of appropriate feminine behaviour. Accordingly, four figures have become increasingly central to my inquiry: the female victim (physically murdered as well as visually dissected by man),<sup>2</sup> the woman scientist,<sup>3</sup> the sexually unruly female (be she either the lesbian, the insatiable "vamp", or the sexy "bombshell")<sup>4</sup> and finally the she-monster/invasion from outer space.<sup>5</sup> It will be seen that in most cases female social (and thus generic and/or sexual) nonconformity is disciplined and punished, and natural and social order restored. The sexually active female is brutally murdered, starved to death and/or raped (Svela and Svela); the luscious vampire is (phallically) staked and destroyed (Zimmermann); the murderous lesbian is tamed into heterosexuality; the female alien's plan of conquest is stopped and her invasion of Earth heroically overturned (Chibnall); finally the rampaging

she-monster is neutralized by means of rational technology and male-coded science (Conrich). In all of these cases, male anxiety prevails and defuses (hence the high number of female characters subject to male erotic contemplation), and yet it leaves space for the representation of a new model of woman, that would develop and make its presence felt just a few years on.

§1. "This is the worst possible time in history to die. Space-travel, science, the whole world waking up and stretching itself. A new age is beginning. I know it's dangerous. But it's wonderful to be alive in it. I love, I adore *my* age." (Fowles 234) The dramatic monologue of Miranda Grey in Fowles's poignant novel, *The Collector* encapsulates the spirit of the Sixties in the words of an imprisoned woman. Fowles characterizes Miranda's diary entry through the use of the adjective "new" — at the time a term of great historic relevance and multiple social suggestions. Miranda's Britain (which is also Macmillan's and Wilson's Britain, a nation of increasing economic development and expanding social possibilities) (Marwick) stands for a whole set of novelties: New-class People ("with their cars and their money and their tellies and their stupid vulgarities and their stupid crawling imitation of the bourgeoisie") (Fowles 207), triumphing New-Science, the politically-new Labour party — all concepts whose ambiguous value and shifting implications are textually signalled by the down-played coupling with the other adjective, "dangerous."

For Great Britain, the Sixties encompassed some landmark events of contemporary history: the crepuscular British Empire had to face the multiple cultural and social revolutions which make this decade the most controversial of all modern ones. Widespread consumerism and materialism developed amidst the decaying world order of the Cold War (Marwick). The growth of problematic relations between long-time rulers and ever-more-reluctant ruled and the international decline of Britain's imperialistic power (as implied by the independence gained by several of the old colonies and the 1957 failure of the Suez affaire) was reflected on the micro-level of family life by the changing role of women. Improved education, wider employment of female labour force, and the increased sexual freedom allowed by the commercialisation of oral contraceptives, all concocted to elaborate a radically new popular image of Sixties woman as a cultured, career-oriented, sexually active individual, hardly restrainable by the post-war ideology of domesticity. However, just as the female liberation which followed the more public, active role taken up by women during the war crisis of the 1940s had been curtailed and recodified in the following decade through the re-awakening myth of family life and the domestic mission of woman (the "happy-housewife-heroine" creation at the core of the 50s conservative agenda of domestic containment which Betty Friedan aptly labels "the feminine mystique") (Friedan; see also May), in the same way Sixties increasingly liberated female image became the illustration of both women's newly-acquired self-expression and men's galloping anxiety.

Fashion and cultural trends combined to create a "swinging" idea of woman, apparently more self-aware and emancipated, sexually daring and independent, but in reality constructed as an answer to new, but still male-defined social demands. The fashion icons of the period popularised a modern form of glamour which advertised an ambiguous dolly-look — clearly reminiscent of school uniforms, and maybe purposefully made so more appealing — which, despite its aggressively raising hemlines, proposed an innocent and artfully infantilised little-girl's look (Screier; Gaines).

Topless dresses, mini-skirts, hipster trousers, edible knickers, see-through blouses, nudity on stage, streakers, [...]: the dolly-bird symbolised everything new, liberated, daring, sexually abandoned, independent and free. [...] Her little mini-dresses, her round-toed shoes reminiscent of fifties' school-girls, her obviously exaggeratedly painted lower eye-lashes, her white lips (doll-like face) all presented

an image that while sexual, seemed at times to be geared to the paedophiles. (Green 79)

Even the mini-skirt – the fashion garment of the decade and icon of the Sixties' mythical licence - had in fact the "overtones of a little girl's pinafore", and it was designed "to help girls to stay exactly that – girls and not women" (Green 79). Women's image was once again framed, even if now it was by the more technological camera shutter. (Not casually, a professional – often fashion - photographer was chosen as the protagonist of numerous contemporary movies, from *Box of Pin-Ups* to *Blow-Up*, whose main male characters are clearly modelled on celebrity photographer David Bailey.)

John Fowles describes Sixties new image of woman as a (literal) prisoner of male desires and fantasies, and as a victim of his authoritative, prescribing gaze in *The Collector*, a harrowing re-working of the relationship between Ferdinand/Caliban and Miranda narrated in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. (Actually, *The Collector* is a learned re-functioning of several modern as well as classical influences, as implied by the veiled reference to the myth of Psyche.) Miranda Grey, a talented art student from a rather affluent, if disrupted, family, is abducted and finally murdered by Frederick Clegg, an inconspicuous and deeply troubled former bank clerk, made wealthy by the unexpected winning of the pools. Clegg's sudden financial welfare convinces him to kidnap Miranda, with whom he has been silently in love for some time, but whose different social context has so far kept beyond his reach. Clegg feels attracted by Miranda's physical appearance, by her exterior elegance and beauty and he intends to keep her prisoner in the basement of his country house until the girl learns to return his affection. (Their relationship is thus built around the paradigm BEAUTY-ART vs. UGLINESS-COLLECTIONISM.)

In reality, Clegg's perverse loving does not require any response from Miranda; he does not want to love her as he might do a human being, but only to possess her as another rare specimen — the most precious one — to add to his butterfly collection. (He literally 'bags' her using a handkerchief soaked in chloroform, as he would an insect. "It finally ten days later happened as it sometimes does with butterflies. [...] you see it on a flower in front of you, handed to you on a plate, as they say.") (Fowles 26). Clegg's ideal woman is beautifully mute and absolutely passive, passionless and pliable, untouched by worldly taint. The gradual understanding that Miranda is a flesh-and-blood individual, 'blemished' by intense emotions, a determined will, and a strong sense of moral superiority fatally condemns her to death.

*The Collector* is made up of four separate parts, of varying length, which narrate back-to-back Miranda's abduction and her eventual death. The first, third and final section of the book are told in retrospective first person and they present Clegg's version of the story. Conversely the second part - aptly surrounded, contained and (even graphically) imprisoned by her keeper's words - gives Miranda's immediate, first-person narration. The double narrative acts in such a way that every event is initially related and then recounted from two totally opposing points of view, and in distinct moments (past and present), thus achieving a twofold process of simultaneous detachment and identification.

Formally, this side-by-side structure has different functions. While Cleggs states the facts, Miranda gives the feelings. The first part of the novel, plainly informative, works as a matter-of-fact, neutral account of Clegg's plans and their bare outcome, in keeping with the man's sick lack of emotions. Miranda's section instead is highly personal in as much as it reveals her thoughts and hopes as they arise. It is written in the form of a diary, in which she expresses herself without inhibition and fear of embarrassment. Thus the spectacularity inherent to the diaristic form takes up and underlines her objectification also on the stylistic level. At the same time, the thriller-like structure of the story contributes to play the two characters off against each other, in an appeal to the morbidity of the audience, who is enticed and stimulated to read further, one crisis after another, towards the increasingly probable tragic climax. *The Collector* thus provides an audacious, clinical study of female fear, whose

entertainment value mostly relies on the portrayal of the victim's slow sufferance at the hands of her jailer.

By the end of Part I (but also by means of Clegg's half-mouthed attempts at self-justification scattered throughout the text) the reader has become aware that Miranda is dying, and so her analeptic retelling of the whole story in part two renders her attempts at escape particularly harrowing and distressing. This narrative technique becomes especially effective if we juxtapose two instances of Miranda's fateful resistance, both overshadowed by Clegg's evermore disgusted awareness of her physicality and "human-ness":

#### FIRST SECTION (Clegg's narrative):

Four weeks, I said.

'Don't remind me of it!'

She was just like a woman. Unpredictable. Smiling one minute and spiteful the next.

She said, 'You're loathsome. And you make me loathsome.'

It won't be long.

Then she said something I've never heard a woman say before. It really shocked me. I said, I don't like words like that. It's disgusting.

Then she said it again, really screamed it at me. (Fowles 56)

Then she did something really shocking. I could hardly believe my eyes, she stood back a step and unfastened her housecoat and she had nothing on beneath. She was stark. I didn't give no more than a quick look, she just stood there, smiling and waiting, you could feel it, for me to make a move. ... I know I wasn't normal then, not doing the expected, she did some things which I won't say except that I would have never thought it of her. (Fowles 99-100) It was no good, she had killed all the romance, she had made herself like any other woman, I didn't respect her any more, *there was nothing left to respect*. (103-4, the emphases are mine)<sup>6</sup>

As Clegg's cold-bloodedly puts it, "I think we are just insects, we live a bit and then die and that's the lot. There's no mercy in things"(277). Accordingly Fowles's technique of side-by-side double narration makes Miranda's growing awareness of her impending doom all the more dramatic.

#### SECOND SECTION (Miranda's first-person account):

I am one in a row of specimens. It's when I try to flutter out of line that he hates me. I'm meant to be dead, pinned, always the same, always beautiful. He knows that part of my beauty is being alive, but it's the dead me he wants. He wants me living-but-dead. I felt it terribly strongly today. That my being alive and changing and having a separate mind and having moods and all that was becoming a nuisance. He is solid; immovable, iron-willed. *He showed me one day his killing-bottle. I'm imprisoned in it. Fluttering against the glass*. Because I can see through it I still think I can escape. I have hope. But it's all an illusion. (203-4, the emphasis is mine)

Something's gone wrong in his plans. I'm not acting like the girl of his dreams I was. I'm his pig in a poke. (236)<sup>7</sup>

§3. *The Collector* is all the more an impressive sign-of-the-time text on account of Fowles' skilful backgrounding of his characters' lives (and death) on the changing scenario of Sixties England, a nation whose strong sense of class divisions, social codes and moral prejudices was being effectively undermined by the spreading of sexual permissiveness,

bohemian life-styles and youth angst. Clegg's *nouveau-riche* vulgarity, his boy-next-door suburban monstrosity and ordinary-guy sadism contrast with Miranda's love of art, life, harmony. She openly despises his working-class aspirations (his "petit bourgeois squareness") (75) as well as the banality of the middle-class values he has clingingly taken over: "I know it's pathetic, I know he's a victim of a miserable non-conformist suburban world and a miserable social class, the horrid timid copycatting genteel in-between class" (161).

On a social level, the distrust for modern girls instilled in Clegg by his aunt, the moral and physical manipulating she subjected him to and her misogynist religious bigotry (character and cultural traits which make her dangerously - and all but incidentally - reminiscent of Mrs Bates in Bloch's *Psycho*) are pitched against Miranda's family life, her heavily-drinking mother and pseudo-artistic aunt, a pathetic individual who poses as woman-of-advanced-ideas and art connoisseur in the attempt to keep up with the fast-changing times. Miranda's lack of respect for her aunt, who insists in being called by name (thus failing to be seen as a positive female role model), indirectly refers us back to the contemporary "development of a separate teen culture [which] created a generational schism by setting adolescents off from adults" (Breines 400). Not surprisingly, the girl's scorn takes up the form of cultural patricide.

They're all the same, women like her. It's not the teenagers and daughters who are different. We haven't changed, we're just young. It's the silly new middle-aged people who've got to be young who have changed. This desperate silly trying to stay with us. They can't be with us. We don't want them to be with us. We don't want them to wear our clothes-styles and use our language and have our interests. They imitate us so badly that we can't respect them. (Fowles 193)

Furthermore it is interesting that most of the social and physical contention between Ferdinand and Miranda is described in terms of ocular warfare, in a hierarchical empowering of vision which leaves man's higher position always undebated. From the opening pages of Clegg's narrative, Miranda is time and again offered as the passive and disciplined object of the scopophilic instinct of the collector and through his relay of the reader. (In effect Miranda herself compares her underground prison with a glass bottle. "He showed me one day his killing bottle. I'm imprisoned in it. Fluttering against the glass") (Fowles 204). Her embodiment of woman's cultural "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 214) — significantly connected to the post-war cultural phenomenon by which women's eroticised image became a commodity in the market of vision (*Playboy* started coming out in 1953, incidentally also the year of the first Bond novel, *Casino Royal*)(Rubin)<sup>8</sup> - is highlighted through her comparison with a butterfly imago ("I had the same feeling I did when I had watched an imago emerge, and then to have to kill it") (Fowles 80), as much as by the recurrent mention of the (powerless) look of biting contempt ("bold as brass she was") (31) she turns on to the man.

Her eyes seemed very big, they didn't seem frightened, they seemed proud almost, as if she'd decided not to be frightened not at any price. I said, don't be alarmed, I am not going to hurt you. She remained staring at me. It was embarrassing [...]. (29)

As in other cultural products of the period - and here I am thinking in particular of the psychological thriller movies *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho* (both out in 1960) - the economy and violence of man's gaze become central. In *Peeping Tom* the maniac killer is a cameraman who films his women victims as they see their terror in the mirror he has mounted on his handheld camera (Tudor; Hutchings 86-93). In similar fashion, the voyeuristic motel manager Norman Bates is aroused to the murder of Marion by peeping at the girl getting undressed in

her bedroom. (Significantly, voyeurism as an effective hook for the audience is testified by one of the publicity posters of the movie, that teasingly depicts Janet Leigh, sitting on the bed in bra and underskirt, as she turns her last, terrified look towards the camera.)<sup>9</sup> In the case of the movie *Psycho*, it may also be argued - as does feminist film critic Barbara Creed - that it is the fear of the woman's (in this case the mother's) probing gaze that Norman tries to kill in his female victims: "Throughout *Psycho* woman is associated with eyes that stare and appraise" (Creed 141). In the same way, Peter Hutchings has contended that "in *Peeping Tom*, the women who die, from the prostitute onwards, all break the first cinematic 'rule': they look directly at the camera, that is they resist being the object of its voyeuristic gaze" (91; see also Modleski, 1986 and Clover). In point of fact the victims of Norman Bates (*Psycho*) and Mark Lewis (*Peeping Tom*) are independent women - either working outside the home and/or represented according to the requirements of a liberated sexuality, free from the constraints of marriage and the family - who are put back in place by the psychopathic killers, both of whom wield sharpened and decidedly phallic weapons (a knife and the leg of a tripod) (see also Modleski 1988).<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in *The Collector* the most sexually-charged episodes are scenes of eye combat, with Miranda trying to withstand and return masculine control through an unflinching look. In a crucial passage, Clegg submits the fainted girl to visual rape by artfully arranging her body and dress as a girlie's from man-only fiction. Here the man's voyeurism reinstates his power over the (unconscious) object of his gaze, working as a form of pleasure and reassurance over threatened sexual hierarchies.

Well, then I went down again. She was still out, on the bed. She looked a sight, the dress all off one shoulder. I don't know what it was, it got me excited, it gave me ideas, seeing her lying there all out. It was like I'd showed who was really the master. The dress was right off her shoulder, so I could see the top of one stocking. I don't know what reminded me of it, I remembered an American film I saw once (or was it a magazine) about a man who took a drunk girl home and undressed her and put her to bed, nothing nasty, he just did that and no more and she woke up in his pyjamas. So I did that. I took off her dress and her stockings and left on certain articles, just the brassiere and the other so as not to go the whole hog. She looked a real picture lying there with only what Aunt Annie called strips of nothing on. (She said it was why more women got cancer.) Like she was wearing a bikini. It was my chance I had been waiting for. I got the old camera and I took some photos,.... I started the developing and printing right away. They came out very nice. Not *artistic*, but interesting. (86-7).

It is not surprising then that Miranda's final possession and Clegg's (visual) fulfilment are ambiguously described in terms of purely ocular intercourse: "I *took* her till I had no more bulbs left." (Fowles 110, mine the italics.) As we shall briefly see in our discussion of Sixties feminocentric SF movies, one of the recurrent threats posed by female space invaders is given by the fantasy of a race of superwomen able to outdo physically, technologically, and ultimately ocularly the now-anguished male terrestrials. In the 1961 SF movie *Unearthly Stranger*, the alien threat attacks the very heart of the idealised domestic idyll of rural Britain when scientist Dr. Davidson learns to his dismay that both his homemaking wife and perfectly efficient secretary come from another planet. Here female utter otherness and her ascendant power are signified by the extraterrestrial lack of blink reflex, i.e. by the female appropriation of the male gaze, which has been described as the central metaphor of the film (Chinball 66).

§3. The ideological bearings of Sixties de-constructions and re-constructions of femininity appear particularly clear if we look beyond the mainstream cultural genres,

towards more popular/populistic forms of narrative and cinema. It needs to be remembered that the Sixties are characterised by the rise of the paperback industry, a phenomenon which caused an unprecedented diffusion of low-cost volumes. (In 1963 Jim Haynes opened the Paperback Shop, the first paperbacks-only bookshop in Britain) (Green 131). Spy-thrillers, pulp fiction and cheap novelettes became increasingly popular through the decade, as testified by the enormous demand for Bond adventures (Bennett and Wollacott 26-27). At the same time, the spectacular of colour filming opened new possibilities for cinema and its modern, family-oriented off-spring, television. As a matter of fact, several among the box-office successes of the decade - such as the Bond cinematic saga - were strongly indebted to and overtly constructed as 'home movies', toned-down family products which went alongside such enormously popular Saturday-afternoon TV serials as *Dr. Who*. (Bond films were released on an annual basis, quickly establishing themselves as a form of institutionalised household ritual. Their popularity is such that since 1975 they have been a regular feature on British TV holiday schedule.) (Bennett and Wallacott 39). Even more significantly, the nature of formula narratives is such that it manages to incorporate and readjust most contemporary popular generic and cultural trend-setters. Accordingly, I would argue that the varying landscape of the Sixties may be effectively reconstructed through an inter-textual analysis of popular cultural genres (science fiction, spy-thrillers, horror films), seen as areas of ideological and cultural concern.

The threat posed to patriarchal society by alien female invaders carrying deadly weapons, ready to transform the Earth into a matriarchy or simply to transport in an intergalactic journey the hapless males, ironically downgraded to emergency sexual aids for fast-declining all-female civilizations (the related Sixties filmography is impressive, but maybe the most campish production of the series still remains *Devil Girl from Mars*, 1954), oversized women out to trash the city (*The Attack of the 50ft Woman*, 1958), and mutant were-creatures ready to attack man (*The Reptile*, 1966) are only a few specimens from Sixties feminocentric pulp filmography. In particular, in SF productions (at the time an overwhelmingly male genre) the menace posed by modern female empowerment was expanded through the use of recurrent, gender-defined, figures: 1) the female scientist - a displaced representation of the modern professional career woman, consciously abdicating to her domestic role in favour of research (as in John Wyndham's novel *Trouble with Lichen*, 1960) or - even more dangerously - overtly linked to extraterrestrial life forms (as in the TV series *A for Andromeda*, 1961), 2) the uncontrollable woman of childbearing age, feasible to alien insemination (as in *The Midwich Cuckoos*, later filmed as *The Village of the Damned*, 1963),<sup>11</sup> or attempting to create life single-handedly from extra-terrestrial embryos (Professor Dawney in *A for Andromeda*) (Leman); and finally, 3) the monstrous creature from down deep, whose unbridled power and extra-large dimensions are linked to the extermination of the human race. (In *Gorgo*, 1961, one of several Sixties British creature features, the mother-monster effortlessly tramples down London most famous urban landmarks of power and civilization) (Conrich 90-91).

Male-authored SF narratives provide an interesting point of view on Sixties anxieties about female empowerment through the recurrent representation of both women scientists and female aliens, two (only apparently unconnected) contemporary constructions of unearthly as well as *unhearthly* generic deviance, where the term 'alien' underscores both planetary and 'non-domestic' Otherness. Once British television re-started its regular post-war broadcasting, in keeping with the changing social scenario female researchers made their appearance in popular adult SF productions such as the *Quatermass* serials (*Quatermass Experiment*, 1953 to *Quatermass and the Pit*, 1958) (Leman) and their cinematic spin-offs. However, much as the Doctor's leading role and salvific function remain unchallenged throughout the episodes, (the audiences are constantly asked to identify with his beliefs and stance), so - ironically - do his female assistants'. In point of fact, despite their academic

proficiency and sound scientific training, women researchers are relevant to the plot only as far as their purely feminine approach in extra-terrestrial communication goes. Although ultimately resolute, their viewpoint is in fact valuable exclusively as the product of women's intuition, nervous refinement and higher susceptibility – psychological characteristics that qualify them for telepathy, in a Space-Age variant of the time-honoured feminine nerve paradigm.

If female professionalism is contemplated at all, this invariably implies the denial of all warmth, emotion and humanity, thus offering a purely intellectual representation which constructs women according to a false (as well as artfully flawed) pattern, in an unquestioning reversal of the deep-rooted “body-feeling” paradigm of female identity. In the post-war society, women are contemplated either as home heroines in their fully-equipped, all-mod-con realms, “where the joy of living can be a baked bean” (Wyndham 1963: 45), or as social oddities, production-line drop-outs who swap Nature and Normality for individualism and solitude, instead of sensibly investing in “going out and buying [themselves] a husband” (Wyndham 1963: 43).

‘Every woman wants a family, at heart,’ [Mrs Brackley] said. ‘It’s only natural.’

‘Habitual,’ corrected Diana. ‘God knows what would happen to civilization if we did things just because they were natural.’ (Wyndham 1963: 44).

Lust-objects or *I-love-Lucy* mindless housewives, complying playmates or Tupperware missionaries: all facets of Sixties constructions of decorative femininity, to which the SF genre simply added the representation of the new, ultimate form of female neurosis: the rejection of motherhood. (In these terms, John Wyndham’s narratives of extra-terrestrial pregnancies are only displaced versions of the New-Woman’s alien mothering, nightmares of female-only reproduction run amok.) During the Sixties, female gender and sexual expression was in fact facilitated by a series of far-reaching social changes. As the divorce rate climbed up, the role of the nuclear family was steadily challenged by alternative life-styles. Abortion law reform, the weakening of the obscenity laws in the US, the marketing of the pill, and the abolition of censorship created a new type of independent womanhood that threatened social order, and at the same time questioned masculinity. In particular, the figure of the scientist, as a successful model of individual achievement, displayed the possibilities of a role (outwith traditional parameters of prescribed sexual and gender behaviour) in which the older generation’s “bedworthy” was substituted by “career-oriented” and “brainy”. As seekers after knowledge and as individual(istic) thinkers, women scientists might question and challenge feminine stereotypes, in a revision that implies the crucial passage from well-trained and suitably-taught appendage to free-willing, enquiring subject. Diana Brackley, the biochemist who discovers the anti-ageing properties of lichens in Wyndham’s *Trouble with Lichens*, describes her profession, and accordingly her radical, non-domestic stance, as a labour of brain.

‘You have to think in my job. That is what it is, mostly,’ retorted Diana.

‘But not *all* the time.’

‘[...] If you just go on taking what they tell you without thinking about it, you’ll turn into advertisers’ meat, and end up as a housewife.’

‘But most people do – become housewives, I mean,’ Zephania said.

‘I know they do – housewife, hausfrau, house-woman, house-minder. Is that what you want? It’s a diddle world, darling. Tell a woman: “woman’s place is in the home”, or “get thee to thy kitchen” and she doesn’t like it; but call it “being a good housewife”, which means exactly the same thing, and she’ll drudge along, glowing with pride.’ (Wyndham 1963: 44-45)



In the paranoid Cold-War climate unruly, potentially explosive women, as much as the destructive, science-driven, atom, were seen in need of the taming, harnessing and domestication that only routinely-stable socio-sexual marital relations would provide.

§4. The "low-brow" texts of the Sixties express as well as regiment the class and gender anxieties of the age, and the popular representations of the feminine are a privileged site to assess this socio-historical process. In particular, Ian Fleming's stories, by far the most successful cinema and literary blockbusters of the decade, are important to recreate Sixties constructions of femininity. The elementary narrative structuring and set actantial constructions of the 007 texts (Eco) offer a reassuringly oversimplistic image of a dyadic woman, seen as good and evil, helper and enemy, rescuer and destroyer. In *Goldfinger* - a novel originally published in the late Fifties, and then transposed with enormous success to the big screen in 1964 - the basic "three girl format" of most Bond books (Bennett and Wollacott 157) is given extra zest by the presence of two sexually deviant females, the mannish Tilly Masterton and the lesbian gang-leader Pussy Galore, who are sidekicked by a third female character, the sensuous and pliable Jill Masterton (Tilly's sister), as the (ironically short-lived) representative of gender-abiding femininity.

When Bond meets Jill for the first time, the girl's reaction to his overwhelming masculinity is all too befitting. The luscious brunette appears conveniently (un)dressed in "black brassiere and black silk briefs" as with the aid of a pair of binoculars she is instructing her employer Goldfinger how to cheat in a game of cards. When she realises that Bond intends to put an end to Goldfinger's swindle, the girl supplicatingly purrs: "If only you'd leave him alone I'd do-' the words came out in a rush - 'I'd do *anything*'" (Fleming 40). A promise which she punctually keeps, as she rides for two days across America in Bond's train berth.

A few weeks later, when the spy meets Tilly Masterton in France, his fantasies of heterosexual dominion seem to repeat all over again. However, whilst the girl's beauty and cold detachment totally engross his attention, her inimical air of determination and independence leave 007 slightly puzzled. Her attire is practical and masculine, her silk shirt "would button up to a narrow military collar" (146) and "there was something faintly mannish and open-air about the whole of her behaviour and appearance. [...] The whole picture seemed to say, 'Now then, you handsome bastard, don't think you can "little woman" me'" (147). Eventually Tilly's overt disdain of the secret agent's otherwise-irresistible charms suggests him some expert socio-sexual philosophising :

Bond came to the conclusion that Tilly Masterton was one of those girls whose hormones had got mixed up. He knew the type well and thought they and their male counterparts were a direct consequence of giving votes to women and 'sex equality'. As a result of fifty years of emancipation, feminine qualities were dying out or being transferred to the males. Pansies of both sexes were everywhere, not yet completely homosexual, but confused, not knowing were they were. The result was a herd of unhappy sexual misfits -barren and full of frustration, the women wanting to dominate and the men to be nannied. (221)

"Will Bond successfully respond to the challenge of effecting her sexual readjustment, and, thereby, 'correctly' realigning her with patriarchal sexual order" (Bennett and Wallacott 116), by putting her back into place beneath him? Prevedibly Tilly's refusal to follow Bond's lead in his final confrontation with Goldfinger ends up with the girl's death, which prompts a chilling cameo of deterministic sexuology on the agent's side: "Poor little bitch. She didn't think much of men. [...] I could have got her away if she'd only followed me'" (240-41).

As a hero of modernising Britain (Bennett), Bond embodies a ruthless, selfish kind of male sexuality which finds its counterpart in the duly groomed Bondmaiden, herself sexually

active, socially independent and apparently representative of the age's new model of woman. However this female sexual readjustment is devised and acted out only in respect of Bond's normative requirements of masculinity, and as such it is described as backing traditional female generic identity. Although apparently free and sexually independent, and competent in the riskiest outdoor activities, the 'Bond girl' is liberated selectively and only according to the needs and demands of male lust, i.e. as an instantly available object to be desired by both hero and audience. Accordingly, the discourse of liberation and modernisation typical of Fleming's novels - a superficially (i.e. sexually) new construction of two Space-Age models of masculinity and femininity - in reality endorses a long-established conservative agenda of gender impersonation. Any source of potential deviance (be it political, economical and, all the more, generic) is duly repressed and redressed by HM Secret Service Agent, who is brought in to repair the faltering political as well as social order of Cold-War Britain (as a shorthand for the Western nations at large), refurbishing patriarchy and its (imaginarily) impaired social structure (Bennett and Wallacott, see also Amis).

Bond regulates a world whose political and domestic institutions are seen as being under threat, so that the independence of his most liberated and self-deterministic female counterparts is bound to be only illusionary. Even Pussy's alleged manhating lesbian power is shortlived once faced by Bond's masterly understanding of what every woman wants. Her overplayed hostility proves irresistible for 007, who, of course, immediately acknowledges "the sexual challenge beautiful Lesbians have for men" (197). Pussy Galore lives up to her name in the final pages of the novel; her sapphic practices are unproblematically accounted for as traumatic response to childhood rape, and she too becomes a willing victim of the phallic (and ideologically-repositioning) therapy imparted by Bond, who instructs her a crash "course of T.L.C." (262).

Thus we might conclude that in the cultural scenario of Sixties Britain, Bond's pathological heterosexuality<sup>12</sup> and his mythical licence to look worked as a form of reassurance over widespread (male) anxieties about disrupted social/generic hierarchies. His plots of passion and action represent the perfect formula of Sixties popular culture, and they seem to exemplify admirably how visual and textual representations relate to changing gender and class relations. In Bondland male desire meets female desirability, man's time-honoured hierarchies and ordering systems curb ascendant female modernity, present-time versions of subversive femininity are defused and gender-benders straightened up, so that in the era of social revolutions we too can say that every one is equal but some (men) are more equal than others.

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<sup>1</sup>. For a discussion of the popular war-time American icon Rosie the Riveter see Meyerovitz. For the literary creations of British post-war female empowerment, see Giles. The issue of representation in its connection to popular culture is helpfully discussed in Hollows.

<sup>2</sup>. FILM: *Psycho*, *Peeping Tom*; BOOK *The Collector*.

<sup>3</sup>. TV: *A for Andromeda* (1961); FILMS: *Spaceways* (1953), *The Strange World of Planet X* (1957); BOOK *Trouble with Lichen*.

<sup>4</sup>. BOOK: *Goldfinger*; FILMS *Dracula - Prince of Darkness* (1966), *Hammer Brides of Dracula* (1969) and "Karnstein trilogy" (*The Vampire Lovers*, *Lust for a Vampire*, and *Countess Dracula*, 1970-1) (Pirie; Maxford).

<sup>5</sup>. Sixties Hammer movies (1964 *The Gorgon*; 1965 *She*; 1966 *The Reptile*; 1968 *The Vengeance of She*; 1969 *The Brides of Dracula*; 1971 *Countess Dracula*) and numerous US and British SF films (1952 *Untamed Women*; 1953 *Cat Women of the Moon*; 1954 *Devil Girl from Mars*; 1956 *Fire Maiden from Outer Space*; *The She-Creature*; 1958 *The Astounding She-Monster*; *Attack of the 50 foot Woman*; *Queen from Outer Space*; 1960 *The Leech Woman*; *The Village of the Damned*; *The Wasp Woman*; 1961 *Gorgo*; 1963 *The Day of the Triffids*; *Invasion of the Star Creatures*, *Unearthly Strangers*; 1966 *Queen of Blood*) (Hardy; Maxford; Hunter 1999 B; Hunter 1999 C).

<sup>6</sup>. Clegg's and Miranda's personalities are played off against each other also by means of very individual styles, which reflect their opposing cultural backgrounds. Clegg's stunted English is juxtaposed to Miranda's more elegant and argumentative style. In particular, his preference for simple and highly idiomatic sentences and his recurring pattern of phrasing point to the rigidity of his thoughts and his ultimate acceptance of – as much as reliance on – common sense, as a set of ideological truisms whose dangerous implications are made evident by the novel.

<sup>7</sup>. Interestingly, Miranda refers to her condition through the metaphor "pig in a poke", by which she means that she has turned out to be different from Clegg's expectations. In this way Miranda indirectly identifies with a pig, through a comparison which highlights the abjection of the female body. In this she adopts a generic stance common to several B-genres, esp. horror (for a discussion of the pig blood episode in Stephen King's *Carrie*, Creed, 1997; see also Lenne).

<sup>8</sup>. Bennett and Wallacott report the appropriation of Bond by *Playboy* magazine, which serialised three novels of the cycle (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service* in 1963, *You Only Live Twice* in 1964, and *The Man with the Golden Gun* in 1965). Other magazines, such as *Penthouse* and *Mayfair*, instituted a regular photo-feature, entitled "The Girls of James Bond" (Bennett and Wallocott 32). In similar fashion, in ch. 15 of *Psycho*, Lila is sickened by the illustrations of the pornographic volumes she finds shelved in Bates's room. She searches the cellar of his house in fear of finding out that her sister Marion has been subjected to the same sexual violence portrayed in Bates's man-only literature. For a discussion of the British post-war pornography film market, see McGillivray.

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<sup>9</sup>. For an engaging discussion of Bond movie posters, photo-essays and paperback covers see Bennett and Wallacott 50-51, 242-439.

<sup>10</sup>. In Bloch's novel, Norman's original crime is the disciplining of his waylaid mother back into appropriate femininity. Mrs Bates is in fact killed after her son has found her in bed with 'Uncle' Joe Considine, her business partner, once the real nature of their relationship has become irrefutable – a solution which would prove in keeping with Norman's special way of putting 'Mother's' errors to right.

<sup>11</sup>. In *The Midwich Cuckoos*, the idea of woman as the passive vessel of extra-terrestrial reproduction is proclaimed. "[How can he know] of how it feels to lie awake at night with the humiliating knowledge that one is simply being used? – As if one were not a person at all, but just a kind of mechanism, a sort of incubator.... And then go on wondering, hour after hour, night after night, *what* – just *what* it may be that one is being forced to incubate." (Wyndham, 1960: 87)

<sup>12</sup>. The casting of Sean Connery as Bond was allegedly due to his over-masculine looks rather than his (unmemorable) Shakespearean background (he was also a former Mr Universe participant and ex-boxing champion). Co-producer Harry Saltzman decided that Connery was right for the part after watching him leave the production office; his rugged appearance and supple movements seemed to imply that "he looked like he had balls" (Walker 187).